United Nations E/CN.5/2019/NGO/62

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 November 2018

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Fifty-seventh session
11–21 February 2019
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: Priority Theme: Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies

Statement submitted by Triglav Circle, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-19515 (E) 201118

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Statement

The Triglav Circle seeks to enrich the public discourse on global problems with moral and spiritual perspectives drawn from universal values. We are a group of concerned world citizens who put together our diverse national and international backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to discern effective ways to address the crucial global problems of our time. We are convinced that these global problems, be they the threats to the integrity of our planet, the rise of violence in all its forms, the persistence of poverty, the emergence of a world divided between the haves and the have-nots, are all linked. They are linked in their causes which are found in the flaws of the dominant culture. They are linked in their remedy, which implies a renaissance of the human spirit. The circle maintains a website: www.triglavcircleonline.org.

Social development "cannot be pursued as a sectoral initiative"; it is "inseparable from the cultural, economic, political and spiritual environment in which it takes place"; its promotion "requires an orientation of values, objectives and priorities towards the well-being of all (...)" These observations from the Copenhagen Programme of Action (chapter 1, paragraph 4) have kept all their significance as the state of the world is in many respects alarming. In particular, inequalities are increasing everywhere and the number of people who feel excluded from their own polity and society is growing.

In such a context, all specific policies, whether fiscal or aiming at the protection of those who "fell behind" and however well-designed, are bound to remain limited in their results and relevance. The causes rather than the symptoms of the continuing aggravation of various forms of inequality and exclusion have to be addressed. As emphasized in Pope Francis encyclical letter Laudato Si, a "change of course" is imperative, a "cultural revolution" is called for. The very meaning of "development", of "progress", and of course of "economic growth" has to be critically re-examined. In this line of thinking, the Triglav Circle, created to pursue the objectives of the World Summit for Social Development, wishes to make three points.

First, the availability and distribution of employment opportunities have a strong bearing on inequalities and, in turn, technological changes largely determine employment patterns. Therefore, science and technology must be purposefully oriented towards the welfare of humankind. In the text of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a strong emphasis is given to science and technology and technological innovation as essential means to bring the economies and societies of the world on a sustainable path. But, if the current dominant credo of a limited role of states and other public organizations, including international, in the economy continues to prevail, it is very doubtful that employment will receive the priority it deserves over profit when firms contemplate new techniques of production and distribution. Before the major ideological change that swept the world in the 1980s, a number of governments, adepts of traditional political liberalism, found ways, through dialogues, incentives and indicative forms of planning to influence the creation and choice of technological innovations. And the United Nations, notably through its Center for Science and Technology for Development, encourage these efforts. It would represent significant progress if these past ideas and practices were to be re-discovered and adjusted to current circumstances.

Second, inequalities, and poverty, are directly related to the functioning of the world economy. The real world economy, made of production and trade of goods and services, is based on competition and is in fact subordinated to financial markets, which are themselves largely unregulated. Competition, in itself a source of emulation and creativity, is too often leading to wage reduction and is also too often negated by monopolistic practices. Unregulated financial markets lead to speculation and to

crises such as the 2008 crash whose consequences were borne by taxpayers. Attached to Goal 10 of the 2030 Agenda, reduce inequality within and among countries — a goal separated from goal 1 on the elimination of poverty — is the timid target 10.5: "improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations." There are currently no signs that even this modest target will be implemented. Moreover, what would be necessary to "leave no one behind" is a thorough re-orientation of the purposes of human activity and of the usage of property. Building a world economy serving the common good would again be the necessary renaissance of an old concept.

Third, inequalities, and poverty, are linked not only to the distribution of wealth but also to the very conception of what constitute wealth and what is the meaning and content of a good life and a good society. Today, in most countries of the world, a small minority of people are accumulating obscene levels of wealth while the poor are getting poorer and the middle-class is asked to make sacrifices and accept various forms of insecurity to satisfy the "needs" of the globalized economy. This is a source of political alienation and a fertile ground for authoritarian regimes in a world in danger of increased fragmentation. Goal 1 on poverty and goal 10 on inequalities have to be implemented in conjunction with goal 12, Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. To save our planet and to maintain harmonious societies and a viable world community are related objectives calling for a renewed understanding of human fulfilment.

Policies aimed at the reduction of all forms inequalities within and among countries have to be oriented and shaped by a holistic vision of a harmonious world society.